

# **SAFE CHURCH POLICY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

## **First Presbyterian Church**

### **General Purpose Statement**

First Presbyterian Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the practices listed below, our goal is to protect the children and youth of First Presbyterian Church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

### **Definitions**

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” or “youth” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “worker” includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children and youth. The term “volunteer” means anyone involved in a day care or school, in overnight activities involving minors, in counseling of minors, or in one-on-one mentoring of minors.

### **Selection of Workers**

All persons who desire to work with the children and youth participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a) **Six Month Rule**

No person will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with First Presbyterian Church for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

b) **Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children in a paid position must complete and sign a written application. The application will detail basic information about the applicant and will list previous experience with children and youth, previous church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the church.

c) **Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the application for a paid position, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

d) **Reference Checks**

Before an applicant for a paid position is permitted to work with children and youth, at least two of the applicants' references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children and/or youth in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at the church office.

#### e) **Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check is required for all employees who work with children and youth.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children and/or youth. A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the church Personnel Committee on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and youth and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children and youth. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at the church office.

### **Two Adult Rule**

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom shall remain open and there shall be no fewer than seven students with the adult teacher. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation.

### **Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse**

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at this church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be

reported immediately to the church Pastor for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at this church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. He or she shall be instructed to have no contact with the alleged victim or with witnesses.
3. All allegations of abuse shall be reported to the civil authorities, and the church will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law dictates. The church will cooperate fully with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. The church's insurance company will be notified, and the church will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will be forwarded immediately to the insurance company.
5. The organization will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the organization shall refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it. This shall be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

## **Open Door Policy**

Classroom doors shall remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors shall never be locked while persons are inside the room.

## **Teenage Workers**

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for young children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least age 14.
- Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

- CPR training is expected if the assistant works with young children on a regular basis.

### **Check-in/Check-out Procedure**

All children utilizing the church's Nursery suite will be checked in by their parent or guardian. The Nursery Care Provider will be responsible for releasing the child to the care of a parent or guardian.

### **Sick Child Policy**

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of children and youth at First Presbyterian Church. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours;
- Green or yellow runny nose;
- Eye or skin infections; and/or
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease.

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up.

### **Medications Policy**

Staff and volunteers of the church shall not administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children and youth under our care. Medications shall be administered only by a parent. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the Nursery Care Provider to develop a plan of action.

### **Discipline Policy**

The staff and volunteers of First Presbyterian Church shall not administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There shall be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the Nursery Care Provider if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

### **Accidental Injuries to Children**

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps shall be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.

2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will be summoned immediately. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed and kept on file in the church office.